



**PAGET HIGH SCHOOL**

*Be Proud • Aim High • Work Hard*

# **A Level Examinations**

**Parents' / Carers'  
Survival Guide**

**2019**

## Notes

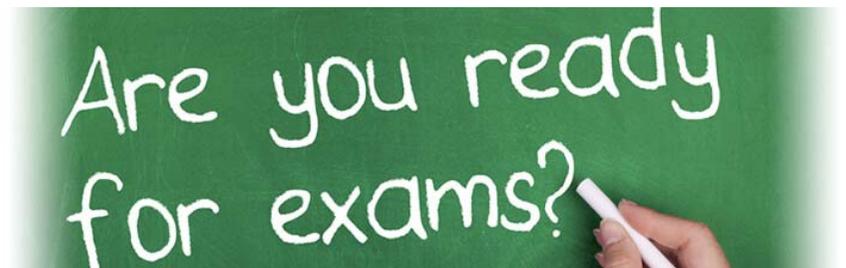
## Introduction

The next phase in our Year 13's education or the new phase of work will be determined by how well they achieve, so the months and weeks leading up to their examinations are likely to be the most pressurised that students have faced. This will bring its own challenges. Our partnership is critical in this period, and this Parents' Survival Guide contains advice about a variety of topics which we hope you will find helpful as you support your son/s or daughter/s through the final weeks of Year 13. As ever, you can always contact school if you have any concerns, our Heads of Faculty or the Sixth Form Team are here to help.

Advice in this booklet has been drawn from a variety of educational and health sources. Advice covers:

- a) Revision Techniques;
- b) Healthy Revision;
- c) Coping with exam stress;
- d) Useful resources / links

Consistent work up to the final exams will pay off, and it is important to keep these months in perspective. Remember Be Proud, Aim High, Work Hard!





For a few, though, there are times when stress tips over into something unhealthy. The point at which this happens will vary with each individual, but there are some indicators:

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Memory problems</li> <li>■ Inability to concentrate</li> <li>■ Poor judgment</li> <li>■ Seeing only the negative</li> <li>■ Anxious or racing thoughts</li> <li>■ Constant worrying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Moodiness</li> <li>■ Irritability or short temper</li> <li>■ Agitation, inability to relax</li> <li>■ Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>■ Sense of loneliness and isolation</li> <li>■ Depression or general unhappiness</li> </ul>
Physical Symptoms	Behavioural Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Aches and pains</li> <li>■ Diarrhoea or constipation</li> <li>■ Nausea, dizziness</li> <li>■ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</li> <li>■ Frequent colds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eating more or less</li> <li>■ Sleeping too much or too little</li> <li>■ Isolating yourself from others</li> <li>■ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li> <li>■ Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax</li> <li>■ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)</li> </ul>

(Adapted from [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_signs.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm))

Students need a strong support network at exam time to help them manage stress. You can help by:

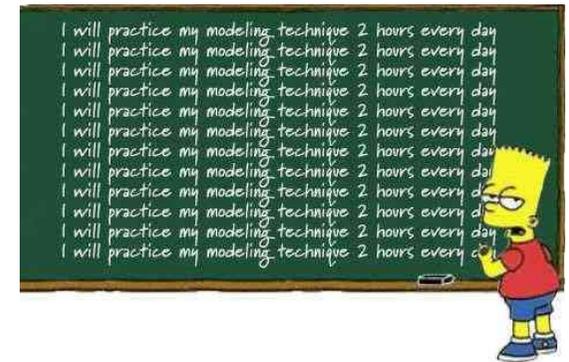
- making sure they know that your love and value for them is not conditional on how they perform in exams;
- making sure they know they can talk to you about how they're feeling;
- being the 'voice of reason' by being objective about the exams;
- providing a suitable place for revision;
- maintaining boundaries (eg bedtimes, implementing revision timetables, time out);
- reducing regular household chores for the exam period;
- testing your son or daughter on what they've just learnt, or being a 'student' for them to teach you the material they've covered;
- giving praise for the work completed;
- providing space and time to relax.

## The Science of Learning

There have been enormous developments in recent years in the understanding of how our brains work and how memory is structured. This knowledge can be put to great use during revision time. Information is transmitted by neurons (brain cells). When we learn something for the first time, new connections are formed and the brain stores the new pattern. We store these patterns daily, and this is excellent for revision. But if the brain is overworked, retrieving those patterns might not work as well as it should.

## Repetition

Pathways between neurons can be strengthened over time. Simple repetition – practising retrieving a memory over and over – is the best form of consolidating the pattern. And again...and again...and again...and again



The ideal time to revise what we've learned is just before we're about to forget it! And because memories get stronger the more we retrieve them, waiting longer each time (a few minutes, hours, then a day, then a few days – a technique known as 'spaced repetition') is effective. This explains why we forget things so quickly after a week of cramming for an exam. Because the exponential curve of memory retrieval does not continue, the process reverses and within a few weeks, we have forgotten a substantial amount of what we've learnt.

## Take regular breaks



Breaks are important to minimise interference. When the brain is forced to store many new (and often similar) patterns in a short space of time, it can get them jumbled up. It is important to plan breaks into revision and to look over what's just been learnt before moving on to anything new.

## Avoid distractions

Attention is the key to memorising. By choosing to focus on something, it is given a personal meaning that makes it easier to remember. In fact, most of the problems when it comes to revision have very little to do with the brain's capacity for remembering things; we just struggle to devote our full attention to the task in hand. Playing music while revising will make the task harder, because any speech-like sounds, even at low volume, will automatically use up part of the brain's attention capacity.



Adapted from 'How your Brain Likes to be Treated at Revision Time'  
The Guardian 2012

## Healthy Revision

### Exercise

Exercise helps to kick start the brain and it's also a good way to relax and switch off. Planning some exercise into a revision programme is a great idea. However, plan how to spend leisure time carefully - exam anxiety can be infectious, so meeting up with school friends may not always be the best idea.

### Sleep

Sacrificing sleep for some more revision is never a good idea: performance the following day will be impeded. Winding down to prepare for sleep after revision is critical. Leaving a gap between bed time and revision reduces the brain's activity, and is more likely to lead to a good night's sleep. Sleep also plays a critical role in memory consolidation – when the brain backs up short-term patterns and creates long-term memories.

### Diet

A healthy diet during revision and exams keeps energy levels high. A good diet will also increase chances of staying well during exam time and keep the risks of catching a virus to the minimum.

Eating breakfast is always recommended to maintain mental focus, and protein-rich foods are healthy choices. Sugar rushes might feel good for a very short time, but they lead to highs and lows, and often feelings of fatigue - not the stable approach needed for exams and revision. Provide healthy snacks for your son or daughter to get through revision and exams.

Dehydration undermines thinking and memory, but a high caffeine intake can lead to feelings of anxiety. Lots of water is recommended.

### Exam Stress

It would be highly unusual for students not to feel stressed about exams. Letting them know that this is normal is a key element for coping.



## Suggestions for a Revision Timetable

Working through the following activities together will help students to produce effective plans:

- List all the subjects and break them down into their major topics and sub-topics. If possible, link those to each exam paper. Try a different colour for each subject;
- Decide which areas will need more time and which will need less. If it helps, use a traffic light system to help. (Red = difficult; amber = so, so; green = OK);
- Work out the amounts of time which should be spent on each sub-topic;
- Work out the priorities: e.g. which revision needs to be done first, as other learning depends on it. Identify any areas where your son or daughter is 'stuck'. Ask them to see the relevant subject teacher at school for more help. Which is a big barrier to moving forward at the moment and would be done better first; which is a minor part of the exam and therefore might not need to be such a priority;
- Draw up a detailed timetable for a fortnight at a time. Blank out the times where there are other commitments; allocate the remaining time to revision as appropriate;
- Nearer the exam time, work out the priorities for revision based on the dates of the exams themselves. Stick the revision timetable somewhere where it can't be missed by you and your son or daughter. Do the same with the exam timetable. Make sure everyone is clear about the dates and times for each exam. Cross each one off as it's done, as this will contribute to a sense of achievement.

## Revision Techniques

The starting point for all revision is obvious: it's RE-vision - re 'seeing' learning which has been undertaken previously. This will be recorded in a variety of places:

- a) Exercise books
- b) Text books
- c) Google Classroom/Shared Google Drive
- d) Past test or exam papers

These are rich sources of the original material which will need to be revisited and applied in the new conditions of the exams in the summer. There are many methods for revision, but students often find some work really well for them, but others are less successful. What is important is that students try out a range of techniques and identify which ones work for them. The most successful students tend to be those who use a variety of techniques to help them to learn.

